

The Social and Psychological Implications of Consuming Entertainment Media Content

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of consuming entertainment content through traditional and modern media on individuals and society. The effects highlighted in this study focus on social and psychological aspects. It was found that, from a social perspective, consuming media content can lead to

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virtual interaction between individuals, but in other cases, it may socially isolate individuals. Psychologically, media entertainment can have positive effects, such as amusement and stress relief, but it can also lead to numerous consequences for the individual, such as addiction when consumed excessively.

Keywords: Entertainment Media, Media Consumption, Social Impact, Psychological Impact.

Introduction

The media, in all its forms, plays a crucial role in the lives of individuals and society. It shapes public opinion, facilitates state communication, and connects individuals to the outside world. Throughout human history, the functions of the media have evolved in tandem with cultural, social, political, economic, and technological transformations, delivering messages and content that influence the behaviours of individuals and societies.

In terms of technology, recent years have witnessed rapid technological advancements across various aspects of life, significantly impacting entertainment consumption patterns. Entertainment is no longer confined to traditional activities; media, whether through television or the internet, has become an essential part of its production. In parallel, the importance of entertainment media has grown in the digital age, where these platforms provide the public with diverse and numerous options, forming content that individuals eagerly consume. This article aims to explore and understand how entertainment media affects individuals and society, focusing on its psychological and social dimensions, thus highlighting the significance of this academic article.

1. General Introduction to Entertainment in the Media:

Most classical sociological and philosophical theories in the media field converge on the belief that the media has three primary functions: news, which is the priority; education, which comes second; and entertainment, which ranks third.² While the news function holds priority, entertainment through the media is equally important, as it is presented in diverse forms and methods. Some content focuses purely on amusement and entertaining the audience, whereas another trend has emerged that combines entertainment and information, known as infotainment. This approach aims to blend enjoyment with education. Another distinct approach that combines entertainment and education has emerged, in which educational content is presented engagingly, making the learning process more captivating without the audience feeling bored.³

² Mohamed El-Youssefi, "Entertainment Programs in Tunisia: Capital Alliances to Kill Serious Journalism," <https://institute.aljazeera.net>, accessed October 20, 2024, 00:45.

³ Amani Reda Abd El-Maksoud, "A Critical Vision of Media Entertainment Studies," <https://alqarar.sa/7687>, accessed October 23, 2024, 22:00.

Entertainment media emerged following the introduction of the printing press in England in 1476, before newspapers were established. At that time, printed pamphlets were a primary source of entertainment for the masses, focusing on scandals, sensational events, and the deaths of celebrities. With the advent of daily and weekly newspapers, they began to include entertainment content aimed at the working class in England. In the United States, entertainment books were among the bestselling books in 1895. With the rise of electronic media, entertainment has become one of the core roles of the media.

Music initially began as live singing on stage, where listeners memorised it. People pay the singer to perform the song again. With the development of printing, songs were later transcribed onto printed sheets. Then, the phonograph was created, which allowed music to be recorded, followed by technological advancements with cassette tapes and compact discs (CDs). In the twentieth century, music spread widely through modern storage technologies such as MP3, DVD, and CD.⁴

The entertainment industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world, particularly with the rise of social media, which has helped fragment it and made it more specialised.⁵ The total revenue of the global entertainment and media industry is expected to grow by 3.9% annually over the next five years, driven by the growth of online advertising and live broadcasting events. Revenues are also projected to increase from \$2.8 trillion in 2023 to \$3.4 trillion in 2028, according to a report from PricewaterhouseCoopers. The same company also predicted that advertising sales would reach \$1 trillion by 2026, representing more than half of the total revenue growth of the industry during that period.⁶

2. Consumption of Entertainment Media Content:

In recent decades, tremendous technological development has significantly impacted various aspects of life, with entertainment consumption being one of the areas most affected. Entertainment is no longer limited to traditional activities such as travel; technology has become a key element in shaping and renewing this consumption in ways that were not possible before. In the past, entertainment options were limited and relied mainly on activities that required physical presence and group participation. However, these possibilities have expanded dramatically with the emergence of modern technologies. Among the most notable transformations are video games, virtual reality, on-

⁴ Suzanne El-Kilani, "Television Drama Within the Framework of the Entertainment Media Function," *Radio Art Journal*, Egyptian Radio and Television Union, Cairo, no. 187, April 2007, 21.

⁵ Amani Albert, "Media and the Entertainment Industry," <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/daily/News>, accessed November 24, 2024, 01:05.

⁶ *Economy of the East* website, "3.4 Trillion Dollars in Global Entertainment and Media Sales by 2028," <https://asharqbusiness.com/economics>, accessed October 20, 2024, 01:00.

demand streaming through platforms such as Netflix and YouTube, and social media, which have become an integral part of the entertainment media experience.⁷

Digital media has significantly contributed to the increase in entertainment content consumption, which can be attributed to several reasons:⁸

- Expansion of internet Use: With the increasing number of online news followers, infotainment has become more popular, especially among digital generations, who rely on the internet for information.
- Presentation of the News in a Distinctive Way: Media organisations have been compelled to meet the audience's needs for news, categorising it in innovative ways to attract followers.
- Widespread News Websites: Platforms such as Google, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and news apps provide users with easy access to the latest news.
- Increased Use of Smart Devices: It has become possible to continuously access news and entertainment content via mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, leading to more significant audience interaction with the media.

The consumption of media by the audience, whether traditional or new, is an important indicator for the media industry, as it reflects consumer preferences for the type of media and the content it offers. This, in turn, influences how the media agenda is shaped and how its priorities are set. From a marketing and advertising perspective, this issue is highly important, as it helps guide those responsible for developing marketing strategies in choosing the most effective platforms to reach the audience, thus enhancing the success and spread of advertising campaigns.⁹

An operational definition of entertainment content consumption in the media can be described as a communicative act in which the media audience is intentionally or unintentionally exposed to content aimed at amusement and entertainment. Examples include watching movies and television programs, listening to music, playing video games, or using social media. This consumption occurs through various devices, such as televisions, computers, smartphones, and tablets. Several personal, social, and psychological factors, such as interest and available time, influence this media consumption.

⁷Rafeef Consulting Company website, "Entertainment Consumption in the Age of Technology," <https://www.rafeef.net/>, accessed October 4, 2024, 09:25.

⁸Amani Reda Abd El-Maksoud, "The Entertainment Function of Media and Its Role in Supporting Family Cohesion," *The Arab Journal of Media and Communication Research*, Faculty of Media, Canadian University of Cairo, no. 30, September 2020, 697.

⁹Alqarar Center website, "Transformations in Media Consumption: From Binge-Watching to Social Media Platforms," <https://alqarar.sa/5107>, accessed October 10, 2024, 10:16.

Experts in communication argue that the audience's attraction to entertainment content is due to two main factors:¹⁰

A. Psychological and Emotional Catharsis: Viewers often suffer from the stresses of life, which create a state of psychological imbalance, prompting them to seek means of achieving psychological adjustment and alignment. Entertainment content provides this compensatory satisfaction as individuals escape from reality into a virtual world through entertainment programs.

B. Dreamlike escape: Entertainment content offers appealing images of a life full of luxury, such as lavish decorations, expensive cars, and fashion trends. The media promotes these aesthetics, leading viewers to associate their social and economic status with the enjoyment provided by the entertainment industry.

3. Psychological implications of consuming entertainment content:

Entertainment is an effective means of alleviating daily depression and managing emotions. The Romans, for instance, used recreational activities as a tool to control the masses. As societies develop, these activities become part of psychological well-being services. According to Freud, humans seek entertainment as a way to overcome anxiety related to the future. Additionally, entertainment is linked to emotional experiences that carry positive memories, making it a primary pleasure source. In this context, entertainment's main goal is to provide psychological comfort.

One of the media's less visible functions is providing catharsis and relaxation. The media offers a means of escaping the stress and alienation caused by modern life in society. Entertainment and enjoyment help individuals spend their leisure time in a way that benefits both them and society. However, this function also has several negative aspects. Excessive entertainment can weaken public taste and increase negative emotions, resulting in an unbalanced personality and affecting an individual's ability to interact appropriately with his or her surroundings.

On the other hand, entertainment allows individuals to choose content that aligns with their interests, enhancing the positive use of media. Entertainment is not limited to pleasure alone; it also revitalises energy and helps individuals return to their tasks enthusiastically. No one can live in an environment of constant seriousness.¹¹

Both researchers Foulkes and Katz presented the concept of escapism in greater depth in their study published in 1962. They emphasised that escaping from reality is a central function of

¹⁰ Fayza Yakhlef, "Entertainment on Arabic Satellite Channels: Concept and Trends," <https://gcc-grt.org/>, accessed October 23, 2024, 22:45.

¹¹ Suzanne El-Kilani, *ibid.*, 23.

entertainment media. They reported that the roles of daily life within modern society generate psychological pressures and increasing tensions, which drive individuals to seek a psychological outlet that alleviates these burdens. This need is fulfilled through escapism, which is satisfied by entertainment content. These contents provide individuals with what is known as compensatory satisfaction, a temporary, imaginary, and illusory fulfilment that compensates for desires and needs that are difficult to achieve in reality beyond what the media offers.¹²

On the other hand, the negative aspects of entertainment media include:

- **Addiction:** This refers to the excessive and repetitive use of media, with an inability to stop or reduce consumption. As a result, psychological symptoms, such as feelings of stress when attempting to stop or reduce usage and sometimes frustration, emerge.
- **Depression** refers to the individual experiencing negative emotions such as sadness, pessimism, guilt, social withdrawal, feelings of failure, and fatigue, in addition to changes in self-image and difficulty in performing tasks.
- **Anxiety** refers to a negative emotional state characterised by nervousness, tension, and heightened sensitivity in the individual.¹³

4. Social Implications of Entertainment Media:

It is certain that traditional or new media play crucial roles in instilling cultural values and habits within society. It contributes to reinforcing existing values, changing them, and implanting new values. Through the continuous repetition of content over extended periods, fixed mental images related to people, things, and various topics are formed in the audience's minds. These images, shaped by the media, intersect with individuals' value frameworks and determine how they organise their relationships with society and how they think and interact with various issues.¹⁴

The American researcher Dennis McQuail noted that the inclination towards entertainment media is not just a fleeting behaviour but is tied to deep needs that individuals cannot satisfy in their daily reality due to difficult economic and social conditions. McQuail suggested that entertainment content serves a compensatory function by providing individuals with a temporary feeling of fulfilment. Although this fulfilment remains illusory, its impact may extend beyond the viewing moment,

¹² Samir Harath, "Television Satellites, Entertainment Production Strategies, and Promotion," *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, University of Blida 2, vol. 09, no. 01, January 2016, 26.

¹³ Nermeen Zakariya Khadr, "Psychological and Social Effects of Egyptian Youth's Use of Social Networking Sites: A Study of Facebook Users," *International Symposium on Family, Media, and Contemporary Challenges 15*, Faculty of Media, Cairo University, February 17, 2009, 31.

¹⁴ Amani Albert, *ibid*.

continuing for varying periods depending on the psychological and personality characteristics of the viewer.¹⁵

Additionally, the application of functional analysis to the study of media and social media platforms reveals the impact of their content on public taste. Some types of content, such as excessive violence, criminal portrayals, horror scenes, pornography, and lowbrow music, may lead to discontent among critics and the public. Such content is believed to harm social values and contribute to the spread of undesirable behaviours, which raises objections to it.¹⁶

This aligns with researcher Melvin DeFleur's perspective on the role of media as a social system. He argues that lowbrow or poor-taste content, which critics often criticise, is a crucial element in the stability of the media system. It provides satisfaction to the largest segment of the audience, contributing to maintaining the financial balance of the media and, consequently, its stability despite ongoing criticism.¹⁷

In contrast, the adverse social effects of entertainment media include the individual's tendency towards isolation and withdrawal from society, which leads to a lack of participation in social activities or interaction with family and friends. Some individuals prefer to spend long periods using the internet, interacting with others in this virtual community.

On the other hand, the positive effects include enhanced social interaction, sharing interests with others, connecting with members of society, building new relationships and friendships, participating in diverse groups, and developing social connections.¹⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, entertainment content in the media has become an integral part of individuals' lives today, providing a psychological outlet and amusement for the audience across various media platforms. With its development, entertainment content has transformed from a means of relaxation to a powerful tool for shaping individuals' behaviour, enhancing their social interactions, and forming virtual relationships. This is a double-edged sword, as entertainment through the media can help

¹⁵ Samir Harath, *ibid.*, 26.

¹⁶ Kamet Abderraouf, Mohamed Bachir Mahmoudi, "The Digital Content Industry in Algeria and Its Relation to the Decline in Public Taste: A Critical Study of Methods and Practices," *Journal of Social Studies and Research*, University of El-Wadi, vol. 13, no. 03, 2024, 207.

¹⁷ Nacera Sahnoune, "Entertainment on Television and Its Relation to Social Values: A Descriptive Analytical Study of a Sample of Viewers of Entertainment Programs on Algerian Television," unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Media Sciences, Faculty of Media and Communication, University of Algiers 3, 2014/2015, 42.

¹⁸ Nermeen Khadr, *Ibid.*, 31.

strengthen social bonds; however, it can also lead to isolation and negatively influence social values. Psychologically, excessive consumption of entertainment content contributes to increased negative emotions and addiction, whereas in moderate cases, it can have a positive effect on reducing stress and stimulating mental activity. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness of how to responsibly engage with entertainment content to balance its benefits and associated drawbacks.

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